Manuscript

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INT. A BOOK PUBLISHER OFFICE. A DESK WITH ALFRED BEHIND IT AND FRANK IN FRONT OF IT. PAPERS AND BOOKS ARE NEATLY STACKED IN THE OFFICE. -- MORNING

FRANK
Please. PLEASE. Just 10 minutes, that's all I ask.

ALFRED
It is a very important meeting.

FRANK
Please. If you do this, I won't ever send you anything else, again. I promise.

ALFRED
Truly?
(handing paper)
Would you be willing to sign your name to that?

FRANK
(signing)
I'll sign anything you want.

ALFRED
Fine. Let us start from the beginning. Your title.

FRANK
I was thinking it was a perfect summation. Bold, yet precious.
(thinking)
Precocious.

ALFRED
Certainly it is.

FRANK
The title says the whole story in three words.

ALFRED
(under breath)
Unfortunately, you could not be so succinct with the text.

FRANK
I cut out 300 pages!

ALFRED
There are 1500 pages left.

FRANK
The story is epic. All the pages are needed.

ALFRED
We publish novels NOT phone books.

FRANK
May I speak freely?

ALFRED
Be my guest.

FRANK
The art you publish is crap.

ALFRED
Crap? This coming from a man who wrote, and I quote, "Hamster like, Moe crept, skulking in the shadowed darkness. He learned his trade from kudzu. Slowly, patiently and with extreme fortitude his path would not be stopped."

FRANK
I thought it was really good.

ALFRED
Hm huh. Let us move on. The main character of your 'story' is Moe.

FRANK
Yes, his name is in the title. If people get confused they can always look on the front.
(indicating)

ALFRED
How innovative. Moe is a submarine captain?

FRANK
His occupation is captain, yes. But, really, he is a metaphor. You know, for all of us, humankind.

ALFRED
So, not only is he a submarine captain, but the captain of his -- our -- soul. An archetype.

FRANK
Yes.

ALFRED
So why is he on a ship of only men? Did you not notice that there is something called a 'woman'?

FRANK
(pause)
Yeah. Moe stands for everyone. Don't you get it? Look on page 823. Down near the bottom.

ALFRED
Heaving breasts?

FRANK
Yeah.

ALFRED
Quite. Let me quote, "The men covered in sweat, dripping their souls out from the very pores of their bodies, rose to the task. Heaving breasts and taught buttocks ran the machine as though they were part of it. The rhythmic thumping reminding Moe of his lost love."

FRANK
Isn't it obvious? Men, women, heaving breasts, tight buttocks? Whatever we do to separate the sexes we are all the same.

ALFRED
Now why couldn't I see that? My colleagues would be quite put out.

FRANK
Don't blame yourself. My writing has a slippery subtlety. Not for the commoner.
(pause)
I don't mean to imply you're common. I can tell by the desk that you're accomplished.

ALFRED
I have done a bit of study.
(pause)
Chapter 23?

FRANK
Ah, chapter 23. It is brilliant isn't it?

ALFRED
Explain.

FRANK
In chapter 23 Moe is in turmoil. The submarine is in serious danger. His men are about to mutiny. He is torn. Unsure for the first time in his young career. Threats both external and internal. Moe cracks and the only way to express his confusion is by poetry.

ALFRED
Allay ambiguity by verse.

FRANK
Uh, yeah.

ALFRED
Here is an example of clarity. I quote, "The seaman slathering, the captain blathering, words not mattering, wind is battering."

FRANK
Not one of my favorites. But the end of the chapter more than makes up for it.

ALFRED
Quite. After 42 pages we have this. I quote "Crashing, smashing, partly dashing against the rock. Stomachs churning, blood is burning, men are yearning. Wind doth roll, bell does toll. Ending bending them all."

FRANK
Doesn't it sing? Those lines took me three days.

ALFRED
Perhaps I am a bit staid. My schooling may have been more parochial so I require further explanation. Please grant me your favor and fill me in.

FRANK
It's simple. Moe exits this reality and to make sense of his perception he must leave behind normal conversation. I've read a lot of Joyce.

ALFRED
Only ten chapters of the piece are 'normal conversation.' Once again my ignorance shows. What is chapter 36?

FRANK
That was the concept. My own, original idea. I wanted the reader to create their own addition to the novel.

ALFRED
What we have is ten chapters of random marks. I thought I had too much sherry.

FRANK
It is SO easy. You'd think with all these degrees you'd be smarter.

ALFRED
It certainly seems I should.

FRANK
Did you even read it? I explained chapter 36 in chapter 33.

ALFRED
My Esperanto is not what it used to be.

FRANK
That's something I always felt strong about. You people need to expand your horizons. If it takes my books to prompt, so be it.

ALFRED
Your prerequisites are many.

FRANK
It seems to me that nowadays people are dumber. They don't have the sense god gave them. I try and talk to these people and they don't seem to understand the most simple things. Like the other day, I was talking to a person in this coffee shop. Our conversation wandered to literature. Something which I have a bit of knowledge about.

ALFRED
Well. I must really be going.

FRANK
No. Wait. We aren't done. Are we? You haven't told me your decision.

ALFRED
So sorry. This is all the time I can spare. Thank you for your submission, and for your time.

FRANK
Sit down.

ALFRED
Pardon me?

FRANK
Pardon me? You make me sick!

ALFRED
(reaching)
Must I call security?

FRANK
(puts hands in pockets)
Sit down.

ALFRED sits.

FRANK
Security? You want security. My work isn't 'normal' enough. It isn't like the rest of the crap you publish. Simpleton. All of you are the same. Afraid of innovation. Scared.

ALFRED
I... uh...

FRANK
Lost for words? Let me help you. Sorry Frank. Your submission shows promise but it isn't what we are currently looking for. Do you know how many times I've heard that?

ALFRED
(joking)
At least once. Ha ha.

FRANK
Literature is in decline. You only want to print safe, dull, shit. My text is groundbreaking. Epic. Too big for your little mind.

ALFRED
Well...

FRANK
Chapter 62. Open to page 1325.

ALFRED opens the book to the page and begins to scan it. His face changes to horror as he reads.

FRANK (CONT'D)
Pretty good, huh? Read the end.

ALFRED
(shaky)
The culmination of Moe's life was the memoirs. The repudiation of his soul in print by the publishers was incomprehensible. The form letters arrived day after day. Thank you, but... each rejection a stab -- at him. Finally he had enough. His manhood was attacked and to protect it Moe had to fight back. He purchased a .45 caliber gun and made an appointment.

FRANK pulls an object from his pocket. It is hidden from the audience.

FRANK
Did that clarify my work?

ALFRED
It has brought it into sharp focus.

FRANK
Would you like to reconsider my submission?

END